

8788

John F. ...

AN  
APOLOGY  
FOR THE  
DISBELIEF  
OF  
REVEALED RELIGION:  
BEING A  
SEQUEL  
TO  
SOBER AND SERIOUS REASONS  
FOR  
SCEPTICISM, &c.

---

BY JOHN HOLLIS, Esq.

---

" I look upon the *right of private judgment* in every concern respecting God  
" and ourselves, as *superior to the controul of human authority*; and have ever  
" regarded *free disquisition* as the *best mean of illustrating the doctrine*, and *estab-*  
" *lishing the truth, of Christianity.*"

BISHOP OF LLANDAFF,

---

London :

PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1799.

1850

DISBELIEF

REVISED EDITION



SCIENCE AND SCIENCE

SCIENCE AND SCIENCE

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

THE BRITISH MUSEUM  
THE BRITISH MUSEUM  
THE BRITISH MUSEUM

LONDON

PRINTED BY THE BRITISH MUSEUM



## ADVERTISEMENT.

---

THE writer of the ensuing pages has therein asserted (intentionally at least) the cause of religious truth; and, *so far*, presumes that he has concurred with liberal Christians, who, he trusts, will judge him with candour, or, at least, with equity. But he will own that, having differed on a subject of great importance from a number of his friends, it has, likewise, been his object to vindicate more fully this part of his conduct, and to preserve as much of their esteem as may be. It is meant, indeed, that what he has written shall go principally among those friends.

4 00 58

---

---

AN

## APOLOGY, &c.

**W**HEN the advocates of revealed religion make demands upon us for our faith, it seems very natural, in this age of free enquiry and discussion, for a thoughtful man to reflect on the matter or matters which we are required to believe. "I find myself (such a man may say) situated, as I conceive, in the midst of the UNIVERSE of God. I contemplate the phenomena *around me*, and perceive nothing at rest; but the grand succession of events which fall under my notice, takes place uniformly and regularly, according to established laws, from the revolution of the heavenly bodies to the change of seasons upon this earthly globe, and to the circulation of the blood in an animal system,



system. From what I experience *within me*, I am convinced that mind is governed by laws as incontrollable as the laws of matter; because I am invariably determined to action by the strongest motive, and I cannot doubt that other men are determined in the same manner. All things, therefore, which come to pass were, I conclude, ordained by, and spring from the operation of, that original Cause, the wise and benevolent Author of the universe; who, being perfectly acquainted with individual and universal nature, knew from everlasting how to dispose properly of every being and every thing, and to what influences it was proper to subject them, in order to produce the proposed result, viz. the *greatest sum of good*. As a true Theist, it is thus I conceive of the Deity exerting his power agreeably to established and invariable laws: for *with him is no variableness or shadow of turning.*"

It seems impossible to consider this great Being as accomplishing his purpose by this uniform and invariable mode of operation, without apprehending it to be the most dignified mode, and perfectly suitable to his character: and, on the other hand, it seems likewise impossible to contemplate him as deviating from this mode so simple and sublime, and as disturbing his own established order by working

ing

ing *miracles*, without esteeming such a *deviation* to be a thing derogatory from him, because implying a *defect* of wisdom or of power. But however unworthy of him such a *deviation* may appear, it is what all the advocates of revelation contend for, and require us to believe. Indeed, there is a great difference between the opinions of some and others of them, respecting the *extent* to which the miraculous power has been exerted; some thinking all the miraculous stories in the Old Testament to be true, and deeming all the scriptural books, without exception, to have the divine sanction and authority; while others think a number of those stories to be fabulous, and entirely disbelieve the inspiration of the greatest part of scripture.

It has been the general opinion among Christians that, in the scriptures the Deity has revealed to mankind the knowledge of himself and of his providential government, and likewise the knowledge of true and genuine morality. And it is remarkable that those Christians who have believed *least* respecting inspiration, have joined with those who have believed *most* in extolling scriptural religion and morality as far the purest and the best, and in defending the sacred books when censured for containing both doctrines and examples of irreligion and immorality.

Whether any unprejudiced person could remain unconvinced of the justice of such a charge after reading those books, I will not determine: but surely prejudice itself must admit it to be an extraordinary circumstance that the noble Lord presiding in the Court of King's-Bench should, on a recent occasion,\* have doubted whether he ought to keep his seat in that court while Mr. Stewart Kyd read passages from the Holy Bible. His lordship, indeed, objected to the reading *parts* of the Bible. But though it is true that detached parts of a connected dissertation may convey a meaning very different from what the writer intended, this observation (as every one must see) does not affect entire and unmutilated narratives, such as those in question, references to which I shall put in the note subjoined.†

But  
 \* The trial of Williams for publishing the *Age of Reason*, 24th of June, 1797.

† The censurable passages, as Mr. Kyd understood them to be, consist of obscene stories, with which he has joined Solomon's famous Song as an instance of voluptuous debauchery: they consist, likewise, of instances of cruel and torturous executions and unrelenting vindictiveness. Relations of the first sort (though certainly not all equally liable to objection) he merely cited, as

The story of Sarah's giving Hagar to Abraham, Gen. ch. xvi.

The



But, what must be a most important consideration to a *religious* man, in those books we find a  
repre-

The transaction of Lot's two daughters with their father,  
Gen. ch. xix.

The disputes of Rachel and Leah about the possession of  
Jacob's person, and their giving each her handmaid to  
Jacob, Gen. ch. xxx.

The history of the rape of Dinah, Gen. ch. xxxiv.

The story of Judah and Tamar, Gen. ch. xxxviii.

The solicitation of Joseph by Potiphar's wife, Gen.  
ch. xxxix.

The story of Zimri and Cosbi the Midianitish woman,  
Numb. ch. xxix.

———— of Sampson and Delilah, Judges, ch. xvi.

———— of the Levites' concubines abused by the  
Gibeathites, Judges, ch. xix.

———— of Abigail, the wife of Nabal, becoming the  
wife of David, 1 Sam. ch. xxv.

———— of Ammon, one of the sons of David, de-  
bauching Tamar, the sister of Absalom, another of  
David's sons, 2 Sam. ch. xiii.

———— of the same Absalom debauching his father's  
concubines in the face of all Israel, on the house-top,  
2 Sam. ch. xvi.

———— of David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah  
the Hittite, 2 Sam. ch. xi.

Mr. Kyd said, he forbore to read these stories at length,  
because he felt it his duty to spare the modesty of an Eng-  
lish audience: for the same reason he did not read, but  
refer

representation not merely unworthy and degrading, but an impious representation of the eternal Deity.

The refer to the Song of Solomon: but with respect to the instances of cruel and torturous execution, and unrelenting vindictiveness, he did not feel himself restrained, and the narratives of these he proposed to read, when Lord Kenyon interfered; and the jury not wishing to hear them, Mr. K. cited the passages as they follow:

The story of the treacherous and cruel revenge of the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, on the Shechemites, Gen. ch. xxxiv.

The history of the slaughter of the Midianites, Numb. ch. xxxi.

The slaughter of the Canaanites by the command of God; particularly the conduct of Joshua to the men of Ai, Josh. ch. viii. and the slaughter of the five kings, Josh. ch. x.

The story of Sisera and Jael, and the Song of Deborah and Barak in exultation at the event, Judges, ch. iv. and v.

The murder of the people of Jabez Gilead, for not having gone up with the rest of the tribes against Benjamin, in the case of the Levite's concubine, Judges, ch. xxi.

The account of Samuel hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal, 1 Sam. ch. xv.

The unnecessary and wanton cruelty of David to the inhabitants of Rabba, the chief city of Ammon, taken after it's siege by Joab, 2 Sam. ch. xii.

The

The more liberal Christians, when speaking of God, as creator, have told us, " That the world originated from his infinite goodness; that he is the benevolent parent of all mankind, and that his object in creating them, was to make them virtuous and happy." And, without doubt, all this is the natural and genuine consequence to be inferred from the character of a being infinitely wise, and good, and powerful. From the books of scripture, however, we learn no such thing. When we read in those books what is mentioned respecting the creation, we meet with such passages as the following: " The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." " By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." It is in this, or a similar strain, that creation is spoken of: and we learn that the world originated from the *power*, indeed, of God; but it is never, I think, ascribed to his *benevolence*. But if any passages of those books were meant to teach us that the object of the Deity,

The murder of Saul's seven innocent sons, on pretence of their father's slaughter of the Gibeonites, being the cause of seven years' famine, 2 Sam. ch. xxi.

David's dying charge to Solomon, respecting Joab and Shimei, 1 Kings, ch. ii.

The slaughter of seventy of Ahab's sons, 2 Kings, ch. x.  
in



in giving being to his intelligent creatures, was the *virtuous happiness* of those creatures; this could never be reconciled with the account given by Christ and his apostles concerning the *unhappy destination* of the majority of the human race. A philosophical Christian must maintain that, under the government of a perfect Deity, no *punishments* can take place except such as are *disciplinary*: but will he be able to shew us that scripture punishments are ever so characterized, unless when certain *favourites* are in question; as when Paul declares, "*We are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world?*" The *spirit of punishment*, indeed, appears to be a *spirit of vengeance* from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New. In the more ancient books, we read of such expressions as these coming from the mouth of God, "I will render  
 " vengeance to mine enemies—I will make mine  
 " arrows drunk with blood:"\* "I will tread  
 " them in mine anger, and trample them in my  
 " fury:"† "I poured out mine indignation upon  
 " them; I have consumed them with the fire of my  
 " wrath;"‡ and in the latter books we find such passages, concerning God's treatment of his human

\* Deuteron. ch. xxxii. † Isaiah, ch. lxiii. Ezek.  
 ch. xxii.

offspring, as the following: " The Lord Jesus  
 " shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty  
 " angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on  
 " them that know not God, and that obey not the  
 " gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be  
 " punished with everlasting destruction from the  
 " presence of the Lord, and from the glory of  
 " his power :"<sup>\*</sup> " If any man worship the beast  
 " and his image, and receive his mark in his fore-  
 " head or in his hand, the same shall drink of the  
 " wine of the wrath of God which is poured out,  
 " without mixture, into the cup of his indignation;  
 " and he shall be tormented with fire and brim-  
 " stone in the presence of the holy angels, and in  
 " the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their  
 " torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."<sup>†</sup>  
 Now, when we read such passages as the above,  
 delivered to us by Jewish and Christian writers,  
 we have ideas irresistibly forced upon our minds;

\* 2 Thess. ch. i.

† It has been objected that there is not any thing in the  
 book of Revelation which will prove the doctrine of eter-  
 nal torments for *human beings* to be a scriptural doctrine,  
 though the book is of acknowledged authority among  
 Christians; because the beast and false prophet are myste-  
 rious personages. But however mysterious they be, the  
*worshippers* of the beast are described as *men*: the objec-  
 tion, therefore, is not to the purpose.

ideas which ill accord with the character of a benevolent creator conducting his intelligent creatures to virtue by means of a *salutary discipline*, but agreeing much too well with that of an evil dæmon producing, and gratifying himself with, the spectacle of human misery.\*

There can be no doubt that the learned and very respectable Dr. Geddes is a believer both in the Jewish and the Christian revelation, although he has not told us how much of the scripture he conceives to have the unquestionable sanction of the Deity. In the general preface to his translation of the Bible, which will not appear till his great work is finished, he will explain himself more fully. In the mean time, having occasion to speak of the extirpation of the Canaanites, in the preface to his second volume, he has, like a good and upright man, expressed himself thus in a note: "After all that  
" has been written, either by Jews or Christians,  
" in defence of this sanguinary measure, I confess  
" my reason and my religion continually revolt at  
" it: and I cannot bring myself to believe that such

\* The above citation from the Apocalypse informs us, that the holy angels and the Lamb are admitted to the enviable privilege of participating in this horrid species of gratification.



" an order proceeded from the mouth of God;  
 " perhaps not even from the mouth of Moses. I  
 " am rather willing to suspect that it is the fabrica-  
 " tion of some posterior Jew, to justify the cru-  
 " elties of his nation. And indeed it is the shortest  
 " way to justify any measure, and to obviate all  
 " troublesome objections. Such a deed could  
 " not be unjust, since God authorized and com-  
 " manded it: who will presume to say that what  
 " God commands is unjust? True; but then  
 " we must first be well assured that he has com-  
 " manded; and the very appearance of injustice  
 " in the act, is to me a stronger proof that he did  
 " not command it, than the authority of all the  
 " Jewish historians put together. I was grieved  
 " to read in a late elegant *Apology for the Bible*  
 " so lame a justification of that passage: and am  
 " tempted sometimes to think that the right re-  
 " verend author must have felt the weakness of his  
 " argument, and seen the disparity of his simile."  
 Such, and so liberal is the manner in which Dr.  
 Geddes has expressed himself: and I own it is  
 gratifying to me, to find that what I have advanced,  
 in opposition to the bishop's argument, has so far  
 the concurrence of such a man.\* He has like-

\* Sober and Serious Reasons for Scepticism, pp. 15, 16, 17, 18.

wife, much to his honour, when animadverting on the pretended divine order for extirpating the Amalekites, thrown out, with virtuous indignation, the following apostrophe: " But, O God of justice, " couldst thou then, have given the sanguinary " injunction to destroy, without mercy and without exception, a whole unoffending nation, men, " women and children, for a crime, real or supposed, committed by their ancestors four hundred years before? Credat Judæus Apella!"

In the further prosecution of my design, I shall now bring forward, and comment more or less upon certain *narratives* from the Old Testament; and I shall do the same respecting a very important and distinguished *doctrine* of the New.

I shall next animadvert on the *morality* of the New Testament.

I shall then shew why I think that, even though a *part* of the objectionable matter might be rejected, the *whole* could not, consistently with the belief of the Christian revelation.

And, lastly, I shall give my reasons for estimating the argument from *testimony* as unsound and insufficient.

## SECTION

## SECTION I.

*Of Objectionable Stories and Doctrine.*

ALTHOUGH it should seem that any exhibition of miracles, to the disturbance and interruption of the course of nature, must be a proceeding unworthy of the immutable Author of nature, it may be observed that, some of those miraculous stories related in the Jewish history, strike one as peculiarly degrading to his character. Very strange it is to read of *colloquial discourses* passing between that great and astonishing Being and his human creatures. Nevertheless we read of many such colloquies with Abraham and others. But what must we think when we are told, Gen. ch. xx. that this same Abraham, while a sojourner at a place called Gerar, basely represented his wife Sarah as being his *sister* and not his *wife*, thus conniving at an adulterous commerce between her and Abimelech the king of Gerar, which Abraham, it appears, *expected* to take place, though, as the story says, it did not: because God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and informed him that he had taken the wife of a man who was a *prophet*, requiring Abimelech, therefore, to restore the man his wife,



wife, otherwise (as we learn from this curious story) God says, "Thou shalt surely die; thou and *all that is thine.*" We are further acquainted that God appointed Abraham the *prophet* to pray for the king that he might live. "So Abraham  
 "prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech (yet it does not otherwise appear that he was sick)  
 "and his wife and his maid servants; and they  
 "bare children: for the Lord had fast closed up  
 "all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because  
 "of Sarah, Abraham's wife."—I say, what must we think of such a tale as this occupying a place in a sacred book? And notwithstanding familiarity has a wonderful power of reconciling us to what is most abhorrent to our natures, surely a person tolerably free from prejudice, cannot fail to shudder, if he will seriously attend to what is related, Gen. ch. xxii. where we are told that God commanded Abraham to *offer up his son as a sacrifice*, and that, in obedience to God, Abraham, having provided wood for the fire, and a knife, was just proceeding to *embrue his hands in his son's blood*, when he was prevented by an angel. That an act in itself so wicked, for which to be *prepared and wrought up*, it was requisite for a man to do such horrid and unnatural violence to himself, that such an act should be deemed acceptable to a just and benevolent Deity, is a sad proof how miserably

bly the human mind may be perverted. This instance, however, of Abraham's obedience, is represented by the historian as so meritorious\* as to have obtained the divine blessing solemnly pronounced, and even sworn, by God himself; and a declaration that, in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And truly it has been very generally believed that, in this declaration Christ was foretold, and the gospel preached to Abraham: for which belief, it must be owned, there is what is called apostolical authority. And by the unthinking *many*, that authority will be esteemed quite sufficient to *sanctify* the above supposed transaction: while the disciples of reason and of nature, will never cease to execrate the *impious fable* as worse even than the former story.

\* It cannot be denied that, if Isaac had been taken from his father by a natural death, Abraham would have had an equal opportunity of displaying his *faith* and *pious resignation*, as in the case related. His peculiar merit then, must consist in his doing, or being ready to do, an act of horrid and unnatural wickedness at the command of God. One may add a remark which presents itself on this occasion, viz. That the trial seems to have been intended not so much for Abraham's *improvement* and *benefit* as for the *information* of the Omniscient Being, who is made to say, by the mouth of the angel, "Now, I know that thou fearest God: seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

In

In the book of Exodus, ch. xxxii. we have the history of the golden calf, which Aaron made at the request of the Israelites, and which they worshipped. Wherefore we are told, "The Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff necked people. Now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." The history then acquaints us that "Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt?" &c. "wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them on the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swearest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. And the Lord repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." A very extraordinary representation this of the true God! and, when the reader has considered it well, he will decide whether



ther it is more suitable to his character or to the character of a frail, irritable, vain-glorious mortal. The *immutable* Deity is here represented as *liable to depart from his purpose*; and, when in great danger, from provocation, of breaking his promise, though bound by his oath to perform it, as being *induced to repent of his rashness by the fear of reproach*.

Dr. Geddes says in the preface to vol. i. of his Translation, p. 12, " Indeed the whole tenor of " the Pentateuch convinces me that the more ancient Hebrews were real anthropomorphites: " and to this alone, I think, we are to ascribe all " those expressions concerning the Deity that seem " to degrade the Deity." In this opinion I perfectly coincide with him, excepting that I must contend for it's being a *real*, and not merely a *seeming* degradation. But if there was a revelation made to these Hebrews, in order to give them the knowledge of the one true God, we certainly should not expect to find them anthropomorphites.

Another specimen of what is so extremely offensive in any work claiming to have the sanction of Heaven, shall be produced, not from the books of Moses, but the 1st book of Samuel, ch. 1st. It is the account of the birth of Samuel, one of the

the most distinguished personages in the Jewish history. The account says that a man named Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninna: the latter of whom brought him children, while the first was barren, though she seems to have been the most favoured. Between these two women there was much uneasiness, for we are told that Hannah's "adversary provoked her sore for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb;" wherefore, it is added, "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore; and she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a *man-child*, then will I give him unto the Lord all the days of his life," &c. In the sequel we are informed that her prayer was granted, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel.

It must be acknowledged there is in this little tale a number of circumstances unnecessary to be particularized by me, which would render it very interesting if it respected not Almighty God, and only concerned some imagined *local deity* with human passions. But can any serious believer in the all-wise Creator and Governor of the world hear,

hear, with patience, of his interfering, by a miracle, to redress a grievance arising from a dispute between Elkanah's two wives? I do not mean to be ludicrous, though some persons might take the occasion. I am in very serious earnest, as I mean to be in all that I shall further advance.

It is not my intention to notice every thing offensive to religion, which is found in the Old Testament. I think it necessary, however, to bring forward certain matters related of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

In the xxth ch. of Isaiah we read, " The Lord  
 " spake by Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saying, Go,  
 " and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and  
 " put off thy shoe from thy foot: and he did so,  
 " walking naked and bare-foot. And the Lord  
 " said, like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked  
 " and bare-foot, three years, for a sign and wonder  
 " upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia: so shall the  
 " king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prison-  
 " ers, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old,  
 " naked and bare-foot, even with their buttocks  
 " uncovered."

In the ivth ch. of Ezekiel, we read that he was commanded by God to make a representation, on



a tile of Jerusalem besieged:—that he was then commanded to lie first on his left side, during three hundred and ninety days, and bear the iniquity of the house of Israel, and afterward to lie on his right side during forty days, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah:—that he was further commanded to make a certain kind of bread, of which he was to eat while he lay on his side three hundred and ninety days:—and that he was likewise commanded to bake this bread *in the sight* of his countrymen, with *human dung*.\* And the Lord said, (as we are told) “ Even *thus* shall the children of Israel “ eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles whither I will drive them.” We are, however, informed that, on his remonstrating, the prophet was permitted to use cow’s dung as a substitute.

What I shall produce respecting the prophet Hosea, occurs in the first and third chapters of the book which bears his name. He is there said to have received an order from God as thus, “ Go, “ take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children “ of whoredoms: for the land hath committed “ great whoredom, departing from the Lord.”

\* If the reader should be disgusted, he may very well suppose that I, too, am so. Nevertheless, if he will take the trouble to consult his Bible, he will perceive that I am guilty of no exaggeration.

It

It is added, " So he went and took Gomer, the  
 " daughter of Diblaim [supposed a common prof-  
 " titute] which conceived and bare him a son,"  
 and, as the narrative further tells us, she afterwards  
 bare him two others. In the third chapter he  
 speaks of himself in the first person. " Then said  
 " the Lord unto me, Go, yet love a woman be-  
 " loved of her friend yet an adulteress, according  
 " to the love of the Lord toward the children of  
 " Israel," &c. " So I bought her unto me for  
 " fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of bar-  
 " ley, and an half homer of barley. And I said  
 " unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days,  
 " thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not  
 " be for another man, so will I also be for thee."  
 But he has not acquainted us that he had any chil-  
 dren by this adulteress.

Now, though there are many whose faith can-  
 not be staggered by any *indecentcy* or *absurdity*,  
 however gross, or *wickedness*, however flagrant,  
 which may appear to have the countenance of their  
 religion, imagining that thereby such enormities  
 are consecrated, and their very nature changed ;  
 there are yet some who are incapable of doing such  
 violence to their reason. Of this number was the  
 late Mr. Farmer, a learned and ingenious man.  
 According to this gentleman, many learned writers  
 have

have attempted to shew that Hosea's marrying Gomer, and taking to him children of whoredom—that Jeremiah's putting a linen girdle upon his loins, going to the Euphrates, and hiding ~~in~~ <sup>it in</sup> a hole of a rock—that these, and many other actions ascribed to the antient prophets, were only *imaginary* and *scenical*, and that narratives of this kind are to be understood as a history only of *prophetic visions*, though it be not *positively said* that the things related were no where performed but upon the stage of fancy. And Mr. Farmer, for himself, declares, “ We may well allow that all  
 “ these things, or most of them, were transacted  
 “ only in vision; not merely because we hereby  
 “ avoid the inconveniences attending the literal  
 “ interpretation; but also because the lively representation of these things in vision conveyed the  
 “ same instruction, and answered every purpose,  
 “ as well as the real performance could have  
 “ done.”\* Notwithstanding this bold assertion, it must be evident, to a person of the commonest understanding, that what thus passed, unobserved by any but himself, in the prophet's own imagination, could not convey instruction to other men, which we learn, from the account of several of these supposed transactions, was their object. Eze-

\* See An Enquiry into the Nature and Design of Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness, p. 34. Note.



kiel, we are told, was ordered to bake his bread *in the sight* of his countrymen; Isaiah to walk naked and bare-foot for a *sign* and a *wonder*; and I think, though it is not expressly so affirmed, we are given to understand that what is said to have been done by Hosea was meant for a *sign* and a *wonder* too. Yet, as *signs* and *wonders*, it is certain that these supposed transactions could not answer their end, unless they were not visionary matters, but matters of fact, and matters also of *public notoriety*. I shall not dispute the *convenience* of this mode of interpretation, which seems to have been the grand reason for adopting it.\*

Such are some of the unworthy, and I scruple not to style them impious, representations of the Deity found in the Old Testament. But it has been asserted that, nothing can be more engaging, or more consistent with true philosophy, than the amiable representations of the Supreme, which the New Testament affords; where he is continually described as a Father:—*whose design, therefore, must be to make his children, i. e. all his creatures, happy.*

Now I am very willing to admit that true philosophy would indeed, lead us to conceive of God

\* See Appendix, No. 1.

as the UNIVERSAL PARENT : but I am persuaded that this idea never found it's way into the mind of Jesus Christ, or the minds of his apostles. The term Father, as used by them, seems to denote the relation subsisting, or imagined to subsist, between the Deity and the *Christian brotherhood*, "the household of faith," with Jesus Christ at the head of it. This appears from the account given by Christ and his apostles of the *future condition* to which the great majority of the human race is destined; which is *a state of misery without end*.

That Christ meant his hearers should thus conceive of the future condition of wicked men, whom he always describes as the great majority, there seems no room to doubt when we read his reiterated declarations concerning the fire that *never shall be quenched*, and the worm that *dieth not*. The language is utterly improper, and what he could not have used, if he intended to be understood as holding out the punishment of *annihilation*, or *complete destruction*. In that case, the appropriate terms would have been a *consuming* fire and a *devouring* worm. The language, moreover, employed by Christ, corresponds perfectly with the apocalyptic account of a lake of fire where men are to be tormented, and where the smoke of their torment is said to ascend for ever and ever.

But

But certain philosophical Christians being shocked, as well they may be, at such a doctrine, affirm that there are no words of Christ which express, i. e. express *literally*, the idea of eternal torments. The writings of the New Testament, it is true, are remarkable for *figurative* expressions. However, the sense of any writer may be clear and determinate, when the expression is *figurative*. If one should say, "The fleet sailed from the *mouth* of the river;" or, "The cottage stands at the *foot* of the mountain:" I cannot believe any man would contend that the words composing either of those sentences do not convey a meaning clear and determinate. It seems evident to me, therefore, that a doctrine may be clearly taught in a book where it is never once expressed *literally*. And, therefore, when Jesus Christ addressed his hearers in the terms above quoted, it appears to me that he taught, though not literally, the doctrine of *eternal torments*, this being the *genuine import* of his words.

It is extraordinary that those philosophical Christians, who say they derive their belief of a future state of virtuous happiness for all human beings, from the gospel of Jesus Christ, should yet find themselves compelled to acknowledge (as I believe most of them do acknowledge) that Jesus

E

Christ



Christ himself, and his apostles, with the exception of Paul, expected the *ultimate destruction* of the wicked, like chaff and tares cast into an unquenchable fire, or a carcase exposed to an immortal worm, which must in time be totally consumed. But if Christ and his apostles expected, and taught, that the Deity intended to consign the great majority of the human race to a miserable existence first, and then to ultimate destruction, they unquestionably never drew the philosophical inference from the *paternal character* of the Deity—that it must be his design to make his children (*viz.* all his creatures) happy. With their views, so to reason was impossible. And further we may remark, though it were admitted that those extraordinary teachers never delivered the doctrine of *eternal* torments, and only taught that God would consign his human offspring to *great* and to *final* misery, surely thus to represent the Supreme Being, is to represent him not as a *benevolent*, but rather as an *unnatural* Father.

When we contemplate the character of a wise and benevolent Parent subjecting his children to *salutary discipline*, from such a character it is not in our power to withhold our *love* and *respect*. But all men must agree to acknowledge that it is not such a character which is suggested to us by the doctrine

doctrine of *eternal*, or that of *final*, misery, or by that striking prediction of fiery vengeance above \* cited from Paul's 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians. Nevertheless, in order to the very *being* of true piety, it is necessary that the worshipper should conceive of the object of his worship as possessing the attributes of wisdom, benevolence and justice : because any thing meriting the name of piety or religion, must include *veneration*. A Deity wanting these attributes *cannot* be a venerable object. Such, however, is the scriptural Deity, as appears from the representations of him which have been adduced from the Old and New Testament. He may be the object of servile fear, or presumptuous confidence ; and miserable flattery may be offered up to him in the way of worship ; he may even be the object of gratitude for partial favour, of which the worshipper may fondly dream : but, till the natures of good and evil are changed, the object of *veneration* he *cannot* be.

## SECTION II.

### *Of the Morality of the New Testament.*

I SHALL now proceed to consider the morality of the New Testament, which by the late Mr.

\* Page 9.

Soame Jenyns was deemed to possess such peculiar excellence as alone to furnish proof of the truth of the Christian revelation. This he has endeavoured to shew in his book on the Internal Evidence. The account of evangelical morality there given by that very elegant and ingenious writer has been highly commended by a living author of great reputation, Archdeacon Paley; though he is of opinion that the proper argument for Christianity, as a revelation, rests upon other ground. The archdeacon, moreover, thus speaks on the subject for himself.

“ The truth is, there are two opposite descriptions of character under which mankind may generally be placed. The one possesses vigour, firmness, resolution, is daring and active, quick in it's sensibilities, jealous of it's fame, eager in it's attachments, inflexible in it's purpose, violent in it's resentments,

“ The other meek, yielding, complying, forgiving: not prompt to act, but willing to suffer, silent and gentle under rudeness and insult, suing for reconciliation where others would demand satisfaction, giving way to the pushes of impudence, conceding and indulgent to the prejudices,



“ces, the wrongheadedness, the intractability of  
 “those with whom it has to deal.

“The former of these characters is, and ever  
 “hath been, the favourite of the world. It is  
 “the character of great men. There is a dignity  
 “in it which universally commands respect.

“The latter is *poor-spirited, tame and abject*.  
 “Yet so it hath happened that, with the founder  
 “of Christianity, this latter is the subject of his  
 “commendation, his precepts, his *example*; and  
 “that the former is so in no part of it's compo-  
 “tion. This, and nothing else, is the character  
 “designed in the following remarkable passages:  
 “*Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on*  
 “*the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and*  
 “*if any man will sue thee at the law, and take*  
 “*away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also; and*  
 “*whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with*  
 “*him twain; love your enemies; bless them that*  
 “*curse you; do good to them that hate you; and*  
 “*pray for them which despitefully use you, and*  
 “*persecute you.* This, certainly, is not common  
 “place morality. It is very original. It shews  
 “at least (and it is for this purpose we produce it)  
 “that no two things can be more different than  
 “the heroic and the Christian character.”

Now

" Now the author to whom I refer [Mr. Jenyns]  
 " has not only remarked this difference more  
 " strongly than any preceding writer, but has proved  
 " in contradiction to first impressions, to popular  
 " opinion, to the encomiums of orators and poets,  
 " and even to the suffrages of historians and moral-  
 " ists, that the latter possesses the most of true  
 " worth, as being most difficult either to be ac-  
 " quired or sustained, and as contributing most to  
 " the happiness of social life."\* Mr. Paley then  
 gives the state of Mr. Jenyns's argument. But,  
 not to extend the quotation, let us admit that the  
 latter of these characters is demonstrated to be the  
 preferable one. Nevertheless, may it not still be,  
 in point of moral excellence, very inferior to what  
 we can conceive? And may we not, very natu-  
 rally, enquire further,

Whether it be not possible to resist and oppose  
 the unjust treatment of wicked men, without being  
 actuated by a spirit of revenge?

Whether the opposing injustice, with firmness  
 and temper, be not the best way to *check* it?

\* See Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity,  
 vol. ii. pp. 101, 102, 103, 104.

Whether

Whether non-resistance of ill-treatment be not the ready way to invite it?

Whether the happiness of social life be not better promoted by properly *checking* unjust men, than by *inviting* and *encouraging* them to acts of injustice?

Whether the precepts enjoining the non-resistance of evil, the complying with unjust requirements, even beyond what is required, the giving more of one's property to him who would wrongfully take away a part (i. e. literally giving a reward for a robbery) do not enjoin a *false and unsound* species of morality? And, lastly,

• The Quakers seem to have been the only *consistent* Christians in regard to the doctrine of non-resistance: all other Christians having not only practised in direct opposition to their Master's precepts, but having, likewise, contumaciously defended their practice. On this occasion, I cannot avoid recollecting the ridicule upon the conduct of the Friends, which Lord Lyttelton, the great champion of Christianity, has put into the mouth of Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, in his dialogue with William Penn. And, I doubt not, his lordship considered Cortez's retort not merely as natural for him to use, but as *just* in itself.

See Dialogues of the Dead.

Whether



Whether it be reasonable to expect that *such* morality should proceed from a teacher of morals, immediately sent from God, and by him specially appointed to that office?

In a sermon of Tillotson's, on the obligations of Christians to a holy life, he uses this language, "When thou art about to *debase* thyself:—remember thou art a Christian." So speaks the archbishop; and he is, by no means, singular. But the exhortation does not accord very happily with the archdeacon's description of the Christian character, as being a *poor-spirited* thing, *tame* and *abject*; a character, however, which he affirms that Christ himself *exemplified*. This, it must be owned, is extraordinary, as coming from a friend to Christianity, and a Christian advocate. What other Christians think of it, I know not. Yet it is certainly a question which they will do well to consider attentively, Whether Mr. Paley be authorized, by the passages he has cited, to apply, as he has, the above-mentioned revolting epithets? Whatever may be their determination on this point, it must be evident, I think, to any person who will exercise his judgment freely, as on other occasions, that the morality of the New Testament is, at least, *imperfect* and *defective*. But I will venture to go further and to affirm that, the doctrine exhibited in  
that

that book, as delivered by Christ himself, is, in some instances, highly censurable for its *immorality*. In proof of this charge, I appeal to two parables recorded in Matthew's history. In the first of these we are told of a king who had a servant that stood indebted to him in the amount of ten thousand talents. "But for as much (says the story) as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." However, upon the debtor's supplication, we are informed that his lord *forgave* him. This servant, nevertheless, refusing to shew like mercy to a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred talents, it is said, "his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him." It is observable, we are not told that *the wife and children* of this servant were delivered to the tormentors, though in the first instance they were ordered to be sold. But, passing over this matter, I would request serious and honest men to declare, Whether they, in their consciences, esteem it a right, or a wrong procedure, to *torment* a person for the non-payment of what, it is confessed, he *cannot* pay? And then, Whether they can see any justice in punishing a man for the non-payment of

\* See xviiiith chapter.

a debt which has been cancelled? What is most deserving of notice in the story is, this unrighteous king is proposed as the *representative* of the Deity.

In the other parable\* we have presented to us a householder who is said to have hired labourers to work in his vineyard, and to have agreed to pay the same sum to all, notwithstanding several of them were hired at a very late hour. When the evening arrived, we are told, "The lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the *last* unto the first." But they who had laboured the whole day murmured, upon seeing those who had laboured one hour only paid equally with themselves. Upon which, the lord of the vineyard is represented as addressing one of the murmurers in the following terms: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not *lawful* for me to do what I will with my own? Is thine eye *evil* because I am good?" Now, though it should be granted that there was no breach of justice in paying the

\* Matt. xxth chapter.



*same sum* to the labourers of one hour and to those who had "borne the burthen and heat of the "day," yet the making such a distinction in the *presence* of those who had dearly earned their hire, will scarcely fail to receive the blame due to an *invidious act* from every good mind which *dares* to have an opinion. But the thing which is most striking, and peculiarly objectionable, is the *general maxim* implied in the question "May I not *do what I will with my own?*" From the mouth of a despot, one would not wonder to hear this language; it might suit well enough the character of an avaricious churl, or a riotous libertine; but surely it is not what we should expect a good man to utter; notwithstanding the person to whom it is attributed calls himself so. It is, however, most extraordinary that this person should, like the King, in the preceding story, be made to represent the *Author of all good*.

\* I do not know that any learned theologian has ever attempted to reconcile the doctrine taught here with the doctrine that men shall be rewarded *according to their works*. Neither do I remember to have met with any one who undertook to shew how well the conduct ascribed to the lord of the vineyard squared with that excellent precept, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

F 2

But,

But, as the moral capacity of man is derived from his intellect, and as the *highest* species of moral merit cannot exist without much intellectual improvement, it is necessary in estimating the morality of the New Testament to consider what aspect the doctrines of that book have upon intellectual culture. And, I think, it will scarcely be affirmed that what we call a liberal curiosity or desire of knowledge ever received much encouragement either from Christ or his apostles. The genius, indeed, of Christianity seems quite unfriendly to the pursuits of science and philosophy. —Christians are told that One Thing is needful,—that they are pilgrims and strangers on earth, and should seek a better country; and they are exhorted to set their affections on things above, not on earthly things. What Mr. Jenyns says of this *detachment from the world* well deserves notice. He describes it as “a moral virtue constituted by this religion [Christianity] alone; so new that, even at this day, few of it’s professors can be persuaded that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all.”\* True it is, that he seems to have thought it needed some explanation: and some persons may imagine he has pretty well explained it away. To me it appears that, where

\* See Jenyns’s View of the Internal Evidence, &c. p. 85.  
this

this new virtue has *taken fast hold*, the mind has generally been disqualified for scientific and for any other than imagined heavenly pursuits; and upon the other hand, I believe, on enquiry, it will be found that, where Christians have attained great eminence as philosophers, they have set their affections both on science itself and on that *distinguished situation* which they have occupied among their fellow men. "They have received honour  
 "one from another, and sought not the honour  
 "which cometh from God only."

That Christ himself was no friend to philosophical investigation is evident from the manner in which he delivered his instructions. He seldom, if ever, spoke but in the tone of authority, and required his *sayings* to be received implicitly, on pain of incurring the displeasure and even the condemnation of the Almighty. And Paul, though an argumentative writer, and by some complimented with the title of philosopher, so far from recommending, has expressly cautioned those to whom he wrote against the mischievous tendency of philosophy. It is alledged, indeed, that Paul, by the term, intended to designate the doctrine of the Gnostics. If so, he is censurable for great inaccuracy, not to say injustice, in giving exclusively the name of philosophy to what he esteemed  
 false



false and mischievous, while (as it is supposed by these his advocates) he was acquainted with a better philosophy, the advantages of which he withheld from those for whose instruction he was writing. In my opinion, the praise of philosophical investigation was not due to him for any thing of his which I have seen; and I do not conceive that he either was, or pretended to be, a philosopher. A philosopher enquires concerning *truth* and *good*; likewise concerning the *nature of man*, and what it is which constitutes his perfection and happiness: And where any *religion* whatsoever is in question, he enquires whether it bears the marks of *truth* and *good*, and how it is calculated to influence the mind. Moreover he is very cautious in his enquiry, lest he should be subjected to imposition, always demanding what shall appear to him just and satisfactory evidence.

Now to me it seems as if it had been the object of Paul to *reprobate* such enquiries, and to brand them, as highly offensive to the Deity. "It is written, (saith he to the Corinthians, Epis. 1. chap. 1.) I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

"world?"—and adds much more in the same strain.

Upon the whole, it is sufficiently evident that the morality of the New Testament, defective as it is, and in certain instances pernicious, is not of divine origin; and it is equally plain that the detachment from the world, the submissive acquiescence and implicit faith required by it's first teachers, are hostile to intellectual improvement. I strongly suspect, indeed, that some advocates for Christianity are not perfectly aware "what spirit they are of." It is not a Christian spirit. In some respects, perhaps it is better.

### SECTION III.

#### *Of Objectionable Matter inseparable from the Christian Faith.*

WHILE the generality of Christians have believed, or affected to believe that the canonical books of scripture were written by men divinely inspired for that purpose, certain speculative and philosophical persons admitting the truth both of the old Revelation and the new, have nevertheless

less thought the greatest part of scripture to have been written without inspiration, because it was unnecessary; and they have likewise thought many things contained in the scriptural books to be, on several accounts, highly objectionable. Some of these matters they have explained away, and others they have rejected.

I do not mean to assert, that a man may not reject much scriptural matter (and much there is) which must be extremely offensive to a religious person who has not renounced his understanding, and still be a consistent believer in both Revelations; but, in my apprehension, there are some things of this kind which are inseparable from the proper Christian faith. And as that which cannot be well disputed, I shall mention the doctrine of Christ himself recorded by the evangelists.

I know there are some Christians who contend for the *fallibility* of their Master: but I doubt much whether he would have admitted such men as his disciples if, when he was living, he had met with any such candidates for discipleship. Should the reader think otherwise, let him carefully attend to the character assumed by Jesus Christ, and the style in which he delivered himself. From the latter, perhaps, his pretensions may be more certainly



tainly learned than from the expressions which, when speaking of himself, he has chosen to adopt. Though he sometimes, indeed very rarely, condescends to *reason* with his audience, the general strain of his lectures is a strain of high authority. This is their characteristic distinction. Again and again the remarkable phraseology occurs "Verily, verily *I say* unto you, &c." Considering this in connection with such passages as the following, in which he announces himself, we can neither be much at a loss concerning his lofty pretensions, nor how he would have borne to hear them questioned. These, we are told, are his expressions: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the *words of God*: for God giveth not the spirit by measure to him.\* "He that loveth me not keepeth not my *sayings*: and the word which you hear is not *mine*, but the *Father's* who sent me†." "Verily, verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doth, these also doth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son and *sheweth him all things* which himself doth, &c‡." "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are

\* John 3d chapter, 34th verse. † John 14th chapter, 24th verse. ‡ John 5th chapter.

“in heaven, *neither the Son, but the Father*.”  
 “All things are delivered unto me of my Father;  
 “and no man knoweth the Son but the Father:  
 “neither knoweth any man the Father save the  
 “Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal  
 “him†.” This is certainly very extraordinary  
 language, and such as, I believe, never fell from  
 the lips of any other human being.

Now the grand doctrine, in the estimation of  
 philosophical Christians, which this singular  
 Teacher delivered, is the doctrine of a future life  
 of *happiness* for good, and *misery* for bad men.  
 But if they believe this doctrine upon the autho-  
 rity of Christ, it appears to me they must, if con-  
 sistent, believe likewise upon the same authority,  
 that the bad men (who, we are told by the same  
 authority, compose the great mass of mankind) are  
 to be consigned to *durable* and *final* if not to ever-  
 lasting misery†; which, consequently, must have

\* Mark 13th chapter. This, indeed, does not agree  
 very well with the preceding quotation: but that is not my  
 affair.

† Matthew 11th chapter.

‡ This is confessed to be the doctrine of *Christ* by some  
 Christians who discover, or think they discover, in the writ-  
 ings of *Paul*, the doctrine of ultimate virtuous happiness for  
*all men*. See p. p. 32, 33, 34, and 35 of this Apology.

been

been the fate always intended for them by their Maker, intended even in the moment of their creation.

The above is adduced as a striking instance of objectionable matter inseparable from the belief of a consistent Christian ; though in my own opinion, it is very far from being the only instance, and it is possible that in this respect, the reader may think with me.

#### SECTION IV.

##### *Of the Insufficiency of the Argument from Testimony.*

THE argument in proof of the Christian Revelation derived from testimony is esteemed the principal argument, and, by very respectable men, considered as irrefragable. I apprehend it will be fairly stated thus :

Because the first Christians professed their confident belief in the truth of the Christian miracles, and because, under the influence of that belief, they acted and suffered and even sacrificed their lives—it is inferred that therefore the Christian



miracles were real; and from their reality the truth of the Christian Revelation is inferred.

In opposition to this may be put the ignorance of the *age*, relative to the subject under consideration, and particularly of the *people* in the first place concerned. To the Jews, a miracle seems to have been nothing very *extraordinary*: and, with the more enlightened part of mankind, prodigies seem not at all to have been inadmissible. The philosophical and scrutinizing spirit of modern times did not exist. And when it has been said, with triumph, that Julian, (who indeed lived some centuries after Christ) although the accomplished and the determined enemy of Christianity did not *deny* the reality of the Christian miracles, it seems to have been forgotten that, with all his accomplishments and great abilities, Julian was *remarkable* as a believer in prodigies and miracles.

Further, whereas it has been asserted that, on supposition the Christian miracles were not real, the state of mind and conduct of the first Christians had no adequate natural cause, and therefore were greater miracles than any mentioned in the New Testament:—now they must, indeed, be admitted to have been miracles if the assertion be true: but that cannot be admitted, since it does not follow that

that there was no adequate natural cause, because we are unable to discover any. A sincere and cordial *belief*, in whatever way generated, was quite sufficient to produce the conduct of the persons in question. How far weak, and ignorant, and superstitious men, who are yet honest and upright, may be *imposed on*, I will not undertake to say : but it must be granted that such men are *liable to imposition* : and, I think, it will not be denied that men of a superior character, amiable PHILANTHROPHISTS prompted by generous sentiments, and aspiring to become the BENEFACTORS of their species, may be induced to *impose both on others and on themselves*. This leads me to suggest to philosophical unitarians, who believe Jesus Christ to have been merely a *human being*, that it may be worth while for them to reconsider the very striking and absolutely *singular* style used by that extraordinary personage when speaking of himself.

With respect to the opinion, that the Jews were familiar with the idea of a miracle, it is derived from the evangelical history. John says, that the brethren of Christ did not believe in him, though they were no strangers to the works which he performed ; for they advised him to render himself more conspicuous thereby, and shew himself to the

the

the world\*. The same writer declares, that though Christ had done *so many* miracles before them (the Jewish people) yet they believed not on him†.— Now, if we reflect on the nature of a miracle, we must see that it cannot fail to excite the utmost astonishment in those present at it, unless they be familiarized to such things : or unless the Supreme Being, (as the historian would have us believe) at the same time that he, by his prophet, works miracles, blinds the eyes of the persons in whose presence they are wrought, and hardens their heart, so that the miracles cannot produce their effect.

That the Jews did not think a miracle to be a very strange thing, seems evident likewise from the story which John relates at the beginning of his 5th chapter:—" There is (saith he) at Jerusalem, by the sheep-marker, a pool, which is " called in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having " five porches. In these lay a great multitude of " impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting " for the moving of the water. For an angel went " down, at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water. Whosoever, then, first after " the troubling of the water stepped in, was made " whole of whatsoever disease he had." On this story it is obvious to remark, that the historian

\* John 7th chapter. † John 12th chapter.



relates it as he would the story of any ordinary occurrence : and, wonderful as the events related must have been, if real, we do not learn from him that they produced any emotion in the bystanders, or even attracted at all the attention of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. At London, I presume, if such things were to happen, the effect would be somewhat different.

The Jews, it is likely, often imagined they saw miracles where none existed. But the *antecedent improbability* of miracles and revelation must, I should think, to a philosopher, be an objection against them almost if not altogether insurmountable. Granting it, however, possible that miracles may have been wrought in order to accomplish some grand design not otherwise to be accomplished even by the *All-wise* and the *Almighty*, it is natural to enquire, Has any such matter been effected by the Christian miracles?—The great object of Christianity, as its advocates declare, was the *reformation of the world*. Allowing then that it was worth while to *disturb the order of nature* for so excellent a purpose. Has the world been reformed? The boldest Christian advocate will not, I believe, assert so much. Seriously, I have no idea of any thing more extravagant than the assertion would be. Yet let us suppose (what cannot be

be thought too little) that, out of the immense population of this globe, during a period of near eighteen centuries some *millions* have become virtuous Christians;—what proportion do they bear to the innumerable multitude of individuals who have composed the generations of mankind which, during the same period, have successively tenanted the earth? Let us also suppose that Christianity has contributed towards the melioration of human affairs. Still, how far the effect is to be ascribed to it *simply* and how far to a liberal and benevolent *philosophy* will not be easily settled. In the mean time, I consider myself as completely justified in affirming, if Christianity was a scheme for reforming the world, *that it has most egregiously failed.*

How it may appear to others I cannot tell, but it does not seem to me very credible, admitting the possibility of miracles, that such an unfortunate scheme should have originated from, and have been supported by, the *miraculous interference* of the Deity : and to an unprejudiced person, I suspect, it will not be very satisfactory, as a solution of the difficulty, to hear “ That the reformation is “ going on and, in due time, will be happily “ perfected,

But,

But, as the world has not been reformed by the Christian religion, should we enquire what that religion has actually done for mankind, it will appear that, in giving occasion to *wars* and *persecutions* the most bloody and rancorous, it has produced a very great quantity of *evil*. Of this there can be no doubt; and, while this cannot be denied, it is foreign to the question to talk, as some do, of it's genuine moral tendency (be that ever so admirable) because we are enquiring about matter of fact. With regard to the *good* which has taken place since the commencement of the Christian æra, part of it at least, probably a large proportion, must be attributed to the *general diffusion of knowledge*. We are pretty well informed what was the condition of Christendom during the middle ages, as they are termed. Since the revival of learning, there has been a progressive improvement, though not regularly progressive. Yet it well deserves notice that, since Christianity has prevailed, there has existed in the world an evil greater than any that was ever experienced before that religion was known:—I mean the African slave trade, carried on by people calling themselves *Christians*. It will be observed, I do not say that this horrid traffic has been *authorized*, and it is not needful for me to prove that it has not been *prevented*, by Christianity.



I do not, however, profess, nor ever have professed, myself qualified to explain sufficiently the conduct of the first Christians: but I find myself in a situation where it is necessary to choose between two difficulties; and therefore I choose the least. I must either admit that the first Christians were *under a delusion*, or that the *all-wise* Author of the universe has disturbed the order of nature for the accomplishment of what has not been accomplished; when, had it been his purpose to reform the world, (as Christians assert) he could have effected that purpose by the *operation of natural causes*,\* without having recourse to *miracles*; which, consequently, were superfluous and unnecessary. The last part of the alternative is, indeed, something more than a *difficulty*; it is an *impossibility*; which, I am satisfied, cannot be truly affirmed of the other, however extraordinary it may appear: and, were we in possession of the *whole truth*, every thing would, I believe, appear very natural.

“Nature well known, no *prodigies* remain.”

---

\* I must request the reader to turn back to pp. 1 and 2:

It is hoped the Apology contained in the foregoing pages, will be sufficient to shew that persons may be induced to become unbelievers in revealed religion by better motives than those which have been imputed to such persons by some, from whom they might have expected different treatment.\*

A love of truth, a dislike of imposition, and a desire of emancipation from unworthy and illiberal prejudices—these are principles† which influence the minds of ingenuous men in their enquiries: and one would be apt to think such men would not find it difficult to conceive that others might be governed by the same principles, though their enquiries should not terminate in the same manner as their own. A different termination seems, however, to have given offence. Yet surely no

\* With respect to myself, I think it right to say here that I have been treated with great liberality by a philosophical Christian, who has done me the honour to correspond with me on the subject of these papers.

† Though these are, in my estimation, virtuous principles, and the pledges of further virtue in the character where they are found, they have been represented (how justly let the reader determine) as existing where there is but little virtue.

one, be his reputation or his merits what they may, is authorized, after having determined for himself, to prescribe the limit for other men, and issue out his prohibition, " Thus far shall ye go, and " no further."



## APPENDIX.

---

WHEN animadverting upon certain strange facts related of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, I had occasion to mention Mr. Farmer's convenient method of solving such difficulties by considering them as merely *visionary*. That method appeared so convenient to him, that he has been induced to convert what the writers of the Gospel History have evidently delivered as *matters of fact*, really and truly performed into *prophetic visions*. I refer to his interpretation of the several narratives of Christ's temptation in the wilderness. This interpretation is principally founded on the phraseology used, where it is said that Christ was *led by the Spirit*, and *driven by the Spirit*, into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mr. F. supposes these expressions equivalent to those used to denote the supernatural operation which was thought to produce visions in the minds of the prophets of the Old Testament. The books, however, where the accounts of these visions occur, are professedly books treating of *visionary matters*. And yet, even in these books, should  
certain

certain things be related as having really taken place, *without any intimation* of their having been *transacted in vision merely*,—to suppose this seems to be doing something very like *violence*. But to make the same supposition respecting a narrative given as a relation of facts which had really happened, by any writer professing himself to be a historian of real transactions,—is surely *violence in the extreme*.

To justify his own interpretation, Mr. F. further, insists much on the impropriety of conceiving the writers in question to mean that Christ was actually led by the Spirit into the wilderness, because he was in the wilderness *already*. It was in the Jordan, however, where we are given to understand that he was baptized by John: and the region bordering on the eastern bank of that river could not be absolutely a *desart*, since it was an inhabited country, though not very populous. But, from Mark's account, it appears that Christ, when in the wilderness, was *among the wild beasts*; which circumstance seems to be mentioned as an aggravation of his trial. It is, therefore, most natural to understand these writers as meaning to say that Christ was led eastward into the country which was, indeed, *a desart without inhabitants*.

Mr.

Mr. F. nevertheless, will have it that these writers intended to inform us not that Christ was led into *the* wilderness, but into *a* wilderness, i. e. a *visionary* wilderness.

Now it is observable that, Dr. Samuel Clarke, and other scripture critics, though not all of equal celebrity with him, had no idea that these narratives of the evangelists could be fairly interpreted, otherwise than as historical relations of matters of fact; excepting what is therein said concerning the exhibition of all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory, in a moment of time; which the doctor supposed to have been a *diabolical* vision.

These learned and able commentators, being not quite so enterprising as Mr. F. probably might judge that, in order to explain what was obscure in the style and manner of a historian, it was proper to have recourse to other historians, rather than to writers of prophecies and visions: and, if the obscurity was found in the production of a man who had himself written another history, perhaps they might judge it peculiarly proper to appeal to that other history, and allow him to be his own expositor. As Luke, therefore, who wrote one of the narratives of the temptation, wrote, like,  
 wife,



wise, the History of the Acts of the Apostles, if in this latter history he has introduced any accounts of *visions*, these learned commentators would, I imagine, enquire in *what way* they were introduced. And if they found him *expressly declaring* the extraordinary matters to be visions, such as Peter's vision of a sheet let down from heaven with a variety of animals, and Paul's directing him to go into Macedonia, they would naturally conclude that, if he himself understood, and intended his readers should understand the temptation of Christ to have been a vision, and nothing else, he would have told them so in plain terms.

Mr. F.'s zeal in behalf of his new hypothesis, was very great, which we need not wonder at: but it seems to have been somewhat extravagant when it drew from him the following language: "The text itself (on the letter of which the common hypothesis rests as it's sole foundation) instead of positively and expressly asserting that the temptation of Christ was a real outward transaction, contains clear intimations, and even *direct assertions*, of the very contrary."\*

If so, can any thing be more wonderful than that, till Mr. F. arose, these *direct assertions* were

\* Inquiry, pp. 40, 41.

never understood by men, the most learned and intelligent?\*

But the new hypothesis was thought convenient, as being not liable to the objections which, in Mr. F.'s opinion, might be justly made to the old one. The chief objections are, that the common hypothesis is very dishonourable to Christ. That it ascribes to the devil the performance of the greatest miracles. That it ascribes to the devil the performance of things not only preternatural, but absurd and impossible.

Mr. F. has said much to illustrate and enforce his objections: but it is unnecessary for me to transcribe it all. That, however, which is to my purpose, I shall produce (*viz.*) what he has urged to shew the dishonour brought upon Christ by the

\* This is barely within the limits of possibility. Those learned men (Dr. S. Clarke, the great Le Clerc, and others mentioned by Mr. F.) would never, I am persuaded, have admitted Mr. F.'s construction of the phrases in question, considering *where and how they occur*: unless they, too, had been fascinated by the *conveniency* of it. To me it appears a ~~far-fetched~~ construction, laboured and over strained, and what even Mr. F. himself would not have thought of but for a particular purpose.

*far-fetched*

common explication. “ Scarce (saith he) can we  
 “ preserve upon our minds a sufficient reverence  
 “ of the sanctity and dignity of the Redeemer,  
 “ when we behold him in such familiar conference  
 “ with, and under the power of, an unclean spirit,  
 “ who at pleasure transports his sovereign and his  
 “ judge from place to place, raises him to the most  
 “ conspicuous stations to expose him to public  
 “ derision, and wantonly and arrogantly propounds  
 “ to him one foolish enterprize after another. It  
 “ fills us with horror, as well as astonishment, to  
 “ consider farther that, during all this transaction,  
 “ Christ must have yielded voluntarily to the mere  
 “ motion and instigation of the devil. For, though  
 “ it was by the spirit of God that he was carried  
 “ into the wilderness, yet it was by the devil that  
 “ he was conveyed from thence to the temple, and  
 “ placed upon it’s battlements; a most dangerous  
 “ and formidable eminence! And, therefore, as  
 “ the devil could have no power over our Lord,  
 “ unless by his free consent, Christ must have  
 “ been accessory to his own dishonour, danger  
 “ and temptation.” \*

I shall now produce what Mr. F. has advanced  
 with a view to convince us that the representations

\* Inquiry, pp. 14, 15, 16.



of a vision may serve equally as well as the objects of sense for the trial, display and improvement of virtue. But unfortunately in this attempt he has, if I mistake not, ruined his grand scheme.

Mr. F. asserts that, " what is imaginary no way  
 " differs, in appearance, from that which is real,  
 " and has the same effect upon the prophet; who  
 " does not at the time, distinguish between the  
 " images of a vision and outward objects. If the  
 " mind (he says) be passive, as no doubt it is,  
 " in receiving these images, and cannot but judge  
 " according to appearances; let it be remembered  
 " that just thus it is with regard to the impression  
 " made by external objects themselves, and the  
 " ideas they raise in the mind; the will having  
 " no more power to controul our inward views  
 " and apprehensions, in this latter case, than in  
 " the former. And as, in both cases, the mind  
 " is alike passive in receiving impressions, so, in  
 " all other respects, it may enjoy an equal liberty  
 " in both. Whether the notice of things is con-  
 " veyed to it by the instrumentality of the senses,  
 " or by a miraculous agency, it may experience  
 " the same disposition and sentiments with regard  
 " to the things themselves. It may be as capable  
 " of a right determination and choice, with re-  
 " spect

“ spect to the representations of a vision, as with  
 “ respect to the objects of sense.”

Now, from the above account of the state of a person's mind, whilst experiencing a vision, it appears we have Mr. F.'s own authority to judge, that Christ, during his supposed vision, though passive in *receiving the impressions*, was, *in all other respects*, at liberty; that he must have felt the same *dispositions and sentiments*, respecting the images impressed, as he would have done if the real objects, which they represented, had been present to him; and that he was equally capable of a *right determination and choice* as at any other time.

Mr. F. himself, therefore, has authorized us to conclude that, though Christ could not, if he would, conceive of his situation, otherwise than as *a wilderness*, and though he could not, if he would, avoid considering himself *in company with the devil*, he was nevertheless, at liberty to *express his abhorrence* of such society, and to *determine* whether or no he would hold conference with that evil spirit. A familiar conference, however, took place; from which it appears that, Christ knew with whom he was conversing, as  
 he

he called him by his name: and, notwithstanding the whole transaction be supposed a vision only, the character of Christ must, inevitably, be affected just as if it had been all a reality. Moreover, when he imagined himself conveyed through the air to the battlements of the temple, and likewise to the top of the mountain, he must have been conscious, I think, of giving his voluntary consent.\* How much soever, therefore, Mr. F.'s religious feelings were shocked by the common interpretation, he would derive no just relief from his new hypothesis; which leaves the objection, respecting the dishonour of Christ, in full force.

Neither is the objection, concerning absurdities and impossibilities hereby removed: though, indeed, they are no longer ascribed to the devil. But absurdity or impossibility is no more the object of divine than of diabolical power.

After all, I believe, we must be content to take the evangelical narratives of the temptation

\* Even if it were admitted that, in conceiving of these transportations, he was subject to the over-ruling miraculous influence, it is utterly impossible that the *familiar conversation* should have been other than *voluntary*.

in



in their plain literal meaning, as, I doubt not, the writers of them intended we should. The use, however, which I shall make of them is, to infer from them the propriety of considering well how much credit is due to *accounts of miracles* given by writers who were capable of presenting us with *such a story*.

4 OC 58

0000